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SHORTGRASS COUNTRY by Monte Noelke

Heat from a state senator's race in the March primaries drew out 516 voters of the 1061 registered to vote at Mertzon, the county seat of Irion County. Numbers in the big urban precinct ran much lower down to a prize winning runoff election in Travis County held a little later at Austin that drew 10,000 citizens to the polls from a registration list of well over 300,000.

After the winner was declared in the state senate race, I made a bee line to the victor's office to make my displeasure clear on how his overwhelming victory had been accomplished. By "clear", I gave him notice that or as long as he hired professional campaign people to override my advice, I was going to keep open a splinter campaign headquarters at my ranch house located one half mile south off the 25 miles of county road serving about 10 ranches and one or two small oil fields.

The plan was to run a dignified, low key campaign, deviating slightly from Mr. Jerry Brown's policy of limiting contributions to a hundred dollars, to raising the ceiling to a couple of grand. The propane distributor in Mertzon calls every three weeks, and quite a volume of folks drop by for directions every month, especially during deer season; which, by the way, coincides with election day in Texas.

Next (and I didn't share this idea with the senator), I contacted the head of the drama department at Angelo State University to see whether he'd be interested in staging the next governor's race in Texas. In the last match, from the nomination contest to the general election, over 40 million dollars was spent by three candidates for the governorship.

Counting election judges and poll watchers and hired clerks who had to be at the polls, memory makes 30 some odd percent sound right as the overall turnout for the big pie of dough spent to advertise the candidacies.

The professor heading the drama department over at ASU on any given play sells out at the modular theater at \$20 a ticket on the night dinner is served and five bucks on other productions. Patrons come from all across the Shortgrass Country. The campus isn't any more convenient, or less so, for citizens in San Angelo than the locations or voting locations. The drawing force is the guy behind the plays who can write and direct well enough to draw big crowds.

Backed by half the money worthies are spending today, he'd have long lines trying to vote. His ear for music and taste in drama would make these previous efforts to cure voters' apathy look like a lion tamer dropping his whip popping act in favor of snapping a mouse trap to set the scene.

Well, I might as well go on and tell you, the senator refused to sanction the headquarters expansion and the good doctor of arts turned down the opportunity of putting on the biggest show of his career.

Funny things go on nowadays. The big bass tournament on the Angelo lakes in June had a polygraph system set up in a trailer house to check every contestant's story. Old friends don't want to listen to old compadres. And campaigners unable to spell "potato" bring down the house.

Where it's going to lead if lie detectors become credible and turn up at debates on election years is too sad to consider. I think I'll vote absentee in the November election and patronize the summer theater out of town to heal my feelings of rejection.